

Focus Kansas



JCCC launches Kansas Studies Institute

Karin McAdam (right), Prairie Village, visits with Dr. Deborah Williams, assistant professor, science, after her presentation, *Kansas: Exploring Ecology*, the first in the Kansas Studies Series.

The Kansas Studies Institute at JCCC begins this fall with a goal to promote research and teaching on the cultures, history, economics and natural environment of Kansas.

"This is an initiative to more firmly establish Johnson County Community College as part of the Kansas community," said Dr. Jim Leiker, director, Kansas Studies Institute, and associate professor, history.

The KSI's first event is a Kansas Studies Series, six continuing education classes taught by JCCC faculty on Kansas topics from September-November, cosponsored by KSI and Community Services.

The Kansas Studies Series features the topics of Kansas ecology, weather, art, dust bowl in literature, ethnic groups and history. Because the series "sold out quickly," according to Linda Cole, director, Community Services, the same series will be repeated in the spring.

"The series provides a menu to people in the community who want to know more about different aspects of Kansas," Leiker said. "We've assembled top-notch faculty doing research on Kansas subjects like meteorology, ecology and history to teach these classes and reach a public audience."

In November, the Institute will introduce the inaugural presentation of the Kansas Lecture Series with Wes Jackson, president, The Land Institute (see story opposite page). The Kansas Lecture Series will occur annually with one

presentation in the fall, one in the spring.

The KSI is also producing a 30-minute video on M.T. Liggett, sculptor, Mullinville. The work is being completed by Bob Epp, senior educational technology analyst; Larry Meeker, JCCC Foundation board member; Dr. Allison Smith, associate professor, art history; and Martha Varzaly, adjunct professor, English. While Liggett has been the subject of previous television interviews, including one on the Discovery Channel, this show will focus on the artist and his prairie-populist politics.

Also in the works is a documentary featuring topics from the Kansas Studies Series, filmed and distributed by JCCC's Video Production department.

JCCC's regional studies institute is unique among community colleges, according to Leiker. Only Sinclair Community College, Dayton, Ohio, has a similar program with its Appalachian studies.

Leiker says the KSI reaches out to two audiences – Johnson County residents who don't know much about Kansas beyond the metropolitan area and residents who have moved to the suburbs from rural areas and want to continue a connection to home.

Tentative plans call for a faculty day-long exchange between JCCC and other community colleges in Kansas.

"JCCC is noticeable, visible and big, but perhaps we've been too self-contained. The Kansas Studies Institute is an official effort to change that," Leiker said. 